

ARMENIAN INSECT NAMES

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The range of names for Armenian insect terms has never been investigated, and is consequently not as well understood as are, say, Armenian bird names, nor as well known as Greek terms for the various fishes and birds¹. Recently Greek insect names were detailed in a most thorough fashion by Malcom Davies, a philologist, and Jeyaraney Kathirithamby (1986), an entomologist. Their book brought a certain order to the range of Greek insect terms which in turn made possible this present brief study of Armenian entomology. Certainly the philological study of insect names is far more complex than the study of bird names; there are nearly a million different insects while species of birds in a given area number only a few hundred and in total throughout the world only about nine thousand (Clement 1981). It is this multiplicity of insects that makes their classification complex: added to this are the narrow discrete variations between these species which vastly increase the difficulties in differentiating for the untrained person. And while amateur ornithologists, who are many, can have a very

1. Both Greek bird and fish names have been carefully investigated earlier in the century by D'Arcy W. Thompson (1936, 1947); my recent work on Armenian bird names (1978) brought some order to Armenian ornithological terminology.

complete understanding of an ornithological paradigm in a given area, only trained specialists, who are few, can have a full understanding of an area's insect life².

The Classical Greek lexicon supports over 200 insect terms, of which eighty-one are mentioned in various works of Aristotle. But it is unlikely that the terms were widely used with any degree of recognizable consistency or precision. Accordingly, we can rarely designate an exact species of insect for a given Greek term; a Greek insect term can only be applied to a broad class of insects. While *kóπις* may indeed mean 'bed bug', we do not know which exact species of bed bug it refers to among the more than thirty available in the family *Cimicidae*³. Similarly the term for a 'gnat' can refer not only to any of the ubiquitous midge-like bugs, but is also used for mosquitoes and other similarly tiny insects⁴.

In one's search for texts mentioning Greek insects, a number of titles appear to be particularly fruitful for Davies and Kathirithamby. Among them especially are Aesop's *Fables* and Aristotle's abundant writings⁵ on natural sciences (*de generatione animalium*, *historia animalium*, *de incessu animalium*, *de partibus animalium* and a few others as listed in Davies and Kathirithamby 1986: 194. For a fairly extensive listing of Greco-Roman scientific comment on insects and kindred beasts, see Scarborough 1979). Insect names can also be rewardingly found in Homer and in the dramatists, where these terms are used forcefully. Stray pieces

2. Aristotle mentioned, in his various natural sciences texts, only eighty-one insect names, out of the tens of thousands that were in the Greek environment, yet of the few hundred birds present in Greece, he named 160.

3. *Cimex lectularius* is the most common in Greece, but the Greeks wrote about many lands.

4. Here there is a great number of families: *Tipulidae* (crane flies), *Bibionidae* (hair flies), *Ceratopogonidae* (biting midges), *Chironomidae* (true midges), *Cecidomyidae* (gall midges), *Simuliidae* (black flies), *Culicidae* (mosquitoes).

5. It was Aristotle who gave us our term for insect, Gk. ἔντομον 'a thing cut into pieces' (whence the Latin calque *insectum*), named so because of the obvious divisions of their bodies (HA 487a33ff., 523b12ff. cf. 531b20ff.).

appear elsewhere.

Classical Armenian literature does not have such a rich corpus to fall back on, but there is some variety. Indeed, in the *Fables* of Mkhitar Gosh, we read of the maybug, bee, locust, butterfly, wasp, horse-fly, mosquito, dragonfly and ant. In the *Fables* of Vardan we find reference to wasp, hornet, horse-fly, flea, gnat, mosquito, locust and ant; as expected, the *Hexaemeron*, with its frequent reference to the legal books of the Old Testament, is a rich source, mentioning, among others, the wasp, beetle, grasshopper, gnat, ant; in the Armenian *Geoponica* (*Book of Labors*) we find the beetle, hornet, worm, louse, horse-fly, caterpillar. There are some unlikely locations, as well. Yeznik is the source for a discussion bearing upon the gadfly, scorpion, gnat, fly, mosquito and ant; and Gregory of Narek, a tenth century writer with a fascination for the old and obscure, not to mention an intensity of focus on the plagues which beset man, mentions the bedbug, weevil, flea, worm, gnat, mosquito, tick, earwig, moth, horse-fly, and spider. These are some principal sources for insect names in Armenian.

Before detailing the inventory of Armenian insect terms, let us first consider the range of Classical Greek insect terms. Davies and Kathirithamby detail fourteen principal sets of insects: 1. ant; 2. bed bug; 3. bee, wasp, hornet; 4. beetle; 5. borers of wood; 6. butterfly, moth; 7. cicada; 8. cricket, grasshopper, locust; 9. flea; 10. fly; 11. gnat, mosquito; 12. leekbane; 13. louse; 14. praying mantis. This list is actually fairly ample, for if one inspects the Indic *Vedas*, one finds sure designations for an even smaller amount: bees, scorpions, fireflies, caterpillars, grasshoppers, flies, ants, locusts and, vaguely, grain insects and winged insects (Macdonell and Keith 1912 II: 581, 582). A somewhat shorter list can be found in Zimmer (1870: 97-98), but which, in addition, includes the scorpion. These groupings for Greek and Sanskrit actually work satisfactorily for Armenian as well; there we can establish these fifteen categories.

1. Ant. Arm. *mrjiwn*. This is the only term for 'ant,' and it is used consistently.

2. Bed bug. Arm. *anic*. This term is glossed in the *NHB* and later dictionaries as the 'nit, the eggs of a louse,' but this is unlikely the earliest meaning since Narekatsi clearly describes the

anic as an insect which bites⁶ and elsewhere the *NHB* classifies it as a biting insect along with the flea and distinct from the louse⁷.

3. Bee, wasp, hornet. Arm. *baltinj* 'wasp, gadfly'; *bař* 'hornet'; *brèt* 'wasp'; *iřmetu* a type of bee, wasp or hornet, but perhaps a horse-fly; *metu* 'bee'; *picak* 'wasp.' The distinction between a bee and a wasp or hornet is clear, for only the bee produces honey, feeding on flowers while the wasp and hornet, in addition to feeding on flowers, also feed on dung, flies and carcasses⁸. Wasps and hornets are morphologically separate from the bee, having their thorax attached to their body by a narrow stalk (hence 'wasp-waisted'). While Arm. *metu* clearly is the bee, it is not clear if the other terms are used with any consistency by Armenian authors.

4. Beetle. Arm. *bzez*. There is no special term for the 'cockchafer,' an old world insect similar to the beetle. The weevil, Arm. *mninay*⁹, a type of beetle, was not viewed distinctively by the Greeks. There is also Arm. *bndernk* 'a particular type of beetle, *Cantheris* (or *Lytta*) *vesicatoria*, from whose dried and crushed shell spanish fly was made.

5. Moth, butterfly. Arm. *t'it'tum* 'butterfly'; *utič*¹⁰ 'moth'; *c'ec* 'moth'. There is a clear division between the terms for 'moth' and the term for 'butterfly.' The root of *utič* 'moth' is derived from *utem* 'eat,' and *c'ec* also appears as part of the adjective *c'ec'aker* 'moth-eaten,' again with emphasis on 'eating.'

6. Cicada. Arm. *čpirn* 'cicada or grasshopper.'

7. Cricket, grasshopper, locust. Arm. *xaragul* 'locust,'¹¹ *marex*, *marax* 'locust, grasshopper.' The Armenians apparently do not

6. Անիծք անկերպաւորք. . . խոցոտեալ ծըծեն (Գր. Նար. ողբ. 1948: 176).

7. Զարչարեւ լուով, ողով, անծով.

8. Aristotle (*HA* 628B) incorrectly denies wasps and hornet non-animal food.

9. From Syriac *mānīnā*

10. The suffix *-ič* occurs also with *luič* 'louse,' and *karič* 'scorpion'; and seems to designate diminutive things: note also *hatič* 'small grain, and *dar'nič* 'endive.' It might ultimately be taken analogically from **čiči* → *čči* 'bug, vermin.'

11. This term is taken directly from the Syriac *xargala*.

distinguish between these similar insects.

8. Flea. Arm. *lu*. This is the only term for 'flea' and it is consistently used.

9. Fly. Arm. *čanč* 'fly'; *gorēx* 'horse-fly'; *jiastac'n* 'horse-fly (or bee, wasp?)'; *ōjamart* 'ichneumon fly.' This term is used in *Leviticus* to translate Gk. *ὀφιομάχης*, (Gk. *ὀφ-* = Arm. *ōj* 'snake'; *μάχ-* = Arm. *mart* 'war,') and appears elsewhere in Armenian only where the *Septuagint* is being discussed (Philo, Evagrius Ponticus, etc.). It is most unlikely that the Armenians saw it as a particular type of fly.

10. Gnat, mosquito. Arm. *mžex* or *mžix*, *mun*, 'gnat, mosquito,' *kaycari*, *p'osuray*¹² 'lightening bug'¹³. It is clear that the Armenians did not distinguish between the gnat and the mosquito, but the firefly was separate.

11. Louse. Arm. *o(r)jil*; the *luič* is more properly an 'aphid,' or 'plant-louse.'

12. Scorpion. Arm. *katič*.

13. Spiders and ticks. Arm. *sard* 'spider.' The tick, Arm. *šanačanč* (literally 'dog's-fly'), is also an arachnid.

14. Sowbug or milliped, Arm. *nepak*, *nepuk*. This term is used by Thomas Artsrunik' without a clear definition;¹⁴ the *NHB* further cites an unspecified medical handbook, where it is noted as a many-footed anthropod¹⁵.

15. Earwig. Arm. *unknamutk* (literally 'ear-entrance', after the fabulous lore that this insect entered the brain through the ear), mentioned by the ancients only in Gregory of Narek¹⁶.

In this way a number of insect names are classified, and we can see order in the Classical Armenian system. Yet there are many names of insects that are missing, insects that we would

12. Taken from Gk. *φωσ-οὔρα 'light-tail'; Hübschmann AG 387.

13. Lightening bugs are actually a type of beetle

14. զի մողեսք. . եկեալ, կերան զորս մորա. . . Արդ. . մեպուկ. . սատակումն եկեցեն "for lizards came to eat his prey, then millipedes will come to wreak destruction.

15. գլորուկ ճիճիմ, որ շատ ոտի ունի.

16. Որպէս ցաննք զագիրք, եւ փոքր զեռունք սարդից, եւ ունամամտից (Գր. Նար. ողբ. 1948: 260).

consider interesting. Among those are the lady-bug¹⁷, junebug, dragonfly, silver-fish, water-skeeter, cockroach and daddy long-legs. Most of these insects are known to us from childhood¹⁸, yet were not part of the entomological paradigm of the fifth century Armenian.

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17. Called a ladybird in British English.

18. As youngsters we were fascinated especially by such bugs as the lady-bug, the daddy long-legs and the various water-skeeters; we knew, though did not enjoy, silver-fish and the cockroach. Certainly these were part of our earliest insect lore, and we wonder how the Armenian children of the fifth century could not have been wholly aware of such distinctive insects, and why the impact of these bugs on the Armenian consciousness was less vigorous than on ours.

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SOME COMMENTS ON NEPUK 'MILLIPEDE, SOWBUG'

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The term *nepuk*¹ in glossed in the *NHB* as a millipede and later, by Bedrossian, additionally as 'woodlouse' (= 'sowbug, pillbug'). That the insect has multiple legs is made clear in a *bžškarān* where there is reference to that aspect², and it would seem to be for this reason that the *NHB* glosses the term as a 'millipede,' while Bedrossian's further inclusion of 'woodlouse' is simply a reasonable extension.

The use of the term in Thomas Artsruni doesn't refer to a great number of legs but implies, instead, that the insect can be

1. According to the *NHB* some manuscripts provide the form *nepak*. The term is a late one, found in the *History* of Thomas Artsruni, written in 1303, and additionally mentioned in an unidentified and undated medical handbook (*bžškarān*).

2. Նեպուկ. գլորուկ նիճին, որ շատ ոտովի ունի. (*NHB*).

found on rotting³ flesh.⁴ This passage is rendered by Robert Thomson (1985: 89) as "When evening came, he was joyfully intending to gorge himself with food but found it bad and spoiled; for lizards and spotted lizards and newts and beetles had come up and eaten his prey. So thenceforth *nepuk* and every kind of insect captured in villagers' pots will come to the royal house to slaughter." Thus Thomas Artsuni expands our knowledge about the *nepuk*: not only is it prodigiously footed, it eats carrion. The sowbug, then, would seem to be an odd translation, for we do not usually associate the sowbug with rotting flesh.

There is, in Greek, a term ἰούλος which is frequently translated as 'sowbug,' but this value is inappropriate when we consider the use of the term in Nicander's *Theriaca* where (669-814) we find reference to nine kinds of scorpions, two types of wasps, and a sowbug (ἰούλος). John Scarborough (1980) shows that the ἰούλος could better be translated as 'millipede' and this would be a more appropriate gloss⁵ since millipedes in their various genera and species do a variety of frightening things, from secreting

3. Forensic records do show that both the sowbug and the centipede are found on rotting flesh, especially in the early days of the rotting. The millipede, though, is considerably more common.

4. Եւ եկեալ երեկոյին խնդալից՝ ական ունէր առնուլ կերակրովիմ, եգիտ ապականեալ եվ գիշակեր. զի մողեսք եւ կովիդեայք, քարաթաթօշք բնդռումք ի վերայ եկեալ կերան զորս նորա: Արդ յայսմ հասէ ըստ նեպուկի գեաղջն կապահամար ժժակք յամենայն ի դռնն արքունի ի սատակումն եկեացնն (Արծր 1887: 27).

5. Millipedes, centipedes and sowbugs are all quite distinct. The millipedes have two pairs of legs for each segment of their body while centipedes have one pair of legs. Centipedes less often feed on offal (as do sowbugs) and are nocturnal. Most millipedes and sowbugs (but not all) curl into a protective spiral; the centipede does not.

repugnatorial fluids to discharging acid sprays⁶. Scarborough shows that ἰσουλός is most probably not a sowbug, and more probably a millipede.

Similarly, the Armenian term *nepuk* cannot agreeably be glossed as 'sowbug' for that term is not usually associated with carrion. The possibility that it would be a centipede is unlikely since centipedes are largely harmless *arthropoda* living on other insects. The millipede, however, though largely vegetarian, feeds on decomposing tissue (Brade-Birks 1930) and would more likely be the multi-legged insect that Thomas Artsruni has mentioned.

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6. For additional destructive powers, see Cloudsley-Thompson 1980: 35-37, Scarborough 1979:18-20, and especially Burt 1947.

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